



**TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 2, 2016 MEETING**

7:30 p.m.
Room 126, Town Hall

Present: Holly Ben-Joseph, (Chair), Peter Darlow, (Vice Chair), David Honn, Michael Dube, (Planning Board Liaison), Janet Adachi, (BoS Liaison)
Not present: Kim Montella

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm

We reviewed meeting minutes from the September 19 and the October 19 meetings. Each set of minutes was approved as amended. Each set of minutes will be posted.

Acton Housing Production Plan

A significant percentage of projects presented to the DRB over the past several years have been housing development proposals utilizing the Chapter 40B process. Members of the board have felt the need to better understand the town's needs and general strategy concerning these projects, given the continued array of proposals that likely will be in the pipeline. Board members individually reviewed the Acton Housing Production Plan, prepared in 2015 in cooperation with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, and the town's Comprehensive Permit Policy, prepared in 2006 by the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board, to establish preferences for the development of 40B projects.

A general discussion ensued on insights gleaned from the documents:

In the *Acton Housing Production Plan*, assessing the needs and establishing goals for lower and moderate income as well as subsidized housing production has been thoroughly discussed. However, there seems to be a lack of an overarching plan to establish the scale, location, and desired density for future development of all housing types, especially amid concerns for respecting the historic districts, open land preservation, and design quality desired.

Acton will struggle to attain the 10% threshold of lower and moderate income housing mix at the current rate of unit production using the specified and preferred strategy for modest scaled 40B housing project types. Several of the recently reviewed proposals for new housing developments have essentially been extremely dense subdivisions, in which the town gains a few moderately priced housing units, (25%), while also gaining a significant number of additional market rate homes, (75%).

Acton does have a significant quantity of existing rental properties offering housing at rates that can be considered affordable. The state is not counting many of the affordable units in Acton because they are not considered "official" 40B units. The DRB suggests that town officials make a concerted effort with state officials to have more of the existing affordable units in town counted as 40B units. To the DRB's knowledge this avenue to increase the 40B total count has not been pursued.

Similarly, Acton has a high number of existing apartment complexes primarily built in the 1960s-1980s. The DRB suggests that the town and the ACHD investigate the possibility for purchasing one or more apartment complexes in their entirety and converting those apartments to 40B units.

Given that available properties for multi-family housing developments are more commonly found in less dense neighborhoods, and in some instances, historic properties, the town's goals for development of affordable housing within walking distance of one of the Villages or Kelley's Corner are often challenged and unmet. In addition, the goal to not disturb large tracts of ecologically rich land that serves as priority habitat is often challenged by the 40B developments that don't have to abide by many local codes. Recently reviewed projects by the DRB suggest that it is difficult for the town to manage these goals given the limitations imposed by the 40B review process.

Members of the DRB concluded that a priority in the coming year will be to reach out to other town boards and interested parties to begin a discussion on whether there can be a more comprehensive and proactive plan approach to attaining the development goals of housing within Acton.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm.

Next Committee Meeting:

Wednesday, November 17, 2016
Acton Town Hall, Room 126, 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by: Peter Darlow